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Ferreira, LOVE'S GRATEFUL STRIVING

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concord between them. In his chapter on miracles, J.A. Cover distinguishes between the claim that an event is anomalous, and the claim that an anomalous event has a divine cause. He concedes that the skeptic can always deny either claim, but that while these options are *available* to the skeptic, they may not always be *reasonable*.

Chapter fifteen concerns Christianity and ethics. Here, Frances Howard-Snyder argues against ethical relativism and for a version of the Divine Command Theory. She outlines some important theoretical problems for this theory, but urges that the truth or falsity of this theory should make no practical difference to the Christian's desire to live a righteous life, since this task involves discovering and following whatever moral rules there are, not discovering *what makes them true*. The final paper concerns the authority of scripture, in which Douglas Blount suggests that it is reasonable to believe the doctrine of biblical inerrancy (which, he notes, does not entail flat-footed literalism). Addressing his argument to Christians, Blount suggests (perhaps non-controversially) that if Christianity is true, then it is indeed reasonable to believe that scripture is inerrant. He then notes that this belief could be rendered unreasonable for the Christian if there were indeed contradictions or clear factual errors in scripture, but that there is no clear evidence of either.

In preparing the volume, the contributors met for two weeks to discuss each other's manuscripts and present their material to lay audiences. Clearly, this process was beneficial, for, on the whole, the authors skillfully present a wealth of complex material in an accessible and engaging fashion. One way in which the book could be improved, however, is by the inclusion of a chapter devoted specifically to theistic epistemology. While many of the authors are obviously indebted to work in this field by Plantinga, William Alston, and others, a sustained exposition of certain major themes in theistic theory of knowledge would be useful to the beginner. Also, the interested reader would be well served by the inclusion of a systematic guide to further reading on the topics covered. Nonetheless, beginners will benefit greatly from this unique resource, and specialists will discover that it sets a high standard for effective introductory exposition of Christian philosophy.

NOTES

1. "Advice to Christian Philosophers", *Faith and Philosophy* 1:3 (1984), 255.
2. Plantinga, A. "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism", in Pojman, L. [Ed.] *The Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1987) and *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Love's Grateful Striving by M. Jamie Ferreira. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. xii, 316. $45.00 (cloth).

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This book is a commentary on Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. It contains a

short introduction, seventeen chapters and a brief conclusion. The seventeen chapters cover in detail all fifteen of the deliberations in *Works of Love* as well as its preface, introductory prayer and conclusion. The book is an important contribution to Kierkegaard studies. It also aspires to convince readers of the enduring value of *Works of Love* for Christian ethics.

When they think of Kierkegaard's posture toward ethics, many people call to mind only the idea that the ethical is that which is teleologically suspended in *Fear and Trembling*, or that which is the alternative to the aesthetic in *Either/Or* or that which is succeeded and surpassed by the two forms of religiousness in the fuller Kierkegaardian account of life's stages. But the ethical in these contexts is to be understood as some more or less free-standing secular ethics, often an amalgam of themes from Kant and Hegel refracted through the standpoint of one or another of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. It would be a mistake to suppose that the ethical thus understood coincides with Kierkegaard's own ethical commitments. By contrast, *Works of Love*, which Kierkegaard published under his own name in 1847, is the primary source for his own views on ethics; it is a brilliant and sustained effort to spell out the demands of a distinctively Christian ethics of love of the neighbor. What is more, it is an ancestor of much of the work in contemporary Christian ethics that belongs to the tradition of agapeistic ethics. Older works such as Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* and more recent works such as Gene Outka's *Agape* stand in a line of descent from it. So anyone interested in that tradition or in Kierkegaard's own ethical thought must eventually grapple with it, and anyone with an interest in the broader topic of Christian ethics would be well advised to do so.

Works of Love is not, however, an easy book to come to grips with, and so it is a work that cries out for good commentary. Part of the difficulty arises from the way Kierkegaard conceives of the task he wants the book to perform. It is meant to provoke people who are not yet aware of the full measure of the demands of Christian love of the neighbor. As Ferreira, paraphrasing Kierkegaard, puts the point, "these people need to be awakened, turned topsy-turvy with respect to the limits of preferential love (erotic love and friendship), but they are already in a position to be directly challenged by the idea of a working Christian love for one's neighbor" (p. 15). In order to provoke, Kiekegaard often indulges in rhetorical exaggeration. Another part derives from the way he exercises his great literary gifts. As Ferreira notes, "Kiekegaard is an elegant and entertaining and at times mischievous writer, and often there is no sense in trying to paraphrase him since his own words dramatically make his points better than any paraphrase could" (p. 9). But frequently the literary bells and whistles—all that mischief and drama—merely serve to distract and, in my opinion, to put on display a certain amount of unattractive literary vanity. In short, *Works of Love* is very far from being under the control of the passion for sobriety and exactness that characterizes the best of contemporary scholarly writing. If it is to be brought into a fruitful conversation with work driven by that passion, a great deal of interpretive charity and a knack for giving plausible deflationary readings of some of its more outrageous claims will be required. Ferreira's commentary does a superb job, for the most part, of reading *Works of Love* charitably; it is in that sense itself a work of love.

Ferreira's decision to comment on *Works of Love* as a whole helps her to interpret in ways that combine charity and plausibility. She is often able to make the case that a passage which, when considered on its own, seems overstated or just plain mistaken actually makes good sense if taken to be suitably qualified by things Kierkegaard explicitly says elsewhere in the book. And since she knows the rest of Kierkegaard's writings very well, she is also able to use them to good effect in clarifying and qualifying the claims of *Works of Love*. The upshot is commentary that with great success places parts of the book in the context of the whole and then goes on to place the book as whole in the larger context of Kierkegaard's entire corpus. The result of this double contextualization is first-rate textual exegesis.

Another strength of Ferreira's commentary is the historical context it provides for *Works of Love*. Looking backward, she compares Kierkegaard's views on the role of good works in Christian life to those of Martin Luther. Relying particularly on Luther's *Treatise on Good Works*, she argues that Kierkegaard offers a useful corrective to exaggerations in Luther's writings that stem from his efforts to correct the unbalanced Catholic thought and practice he confronted. Looking forward, she also connects Kierkegaard's ideas to themes in contemporary French philosophy. She draws attention to some striking similarities between Kierkegaard's ethics of dutiful love for the neighbor and Emmanuel Levinas's account of the ethical responsibility called forth by the face of the Other. And she insightfully compares Kierkegaard with Jacques Derrida on the issues of debt and gift and with Paul Ricoeur on the topic of commanded love.

Ferreira also mounts a spirited defense of *Works of Love* against some of the cultured despisers who have been among the harshest of its recent critics. She responds vigorously to Theodor W. Adorno's charge, set forth in his "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," that Kierkegaard's ethics is abstract and callous and to Knud E. Løgstrup's allegation, made in his recently translated *The Ethical Demand*, that it is absurd and gruesome. Her counterarguments to these critics put it beyond reasonable doubt that they distort and misinterpret Kierkegaard's ethical thought.

I find it hard to imagine that anyone could do a more thorough job of making Kierkegaard's Christian ethics seem defensible and attractive than Ferreira has done in this book. Yet I think her efforts sometimes fail to persuade on points of detail.

An example occurs in her discussion in Chapter 14 of the eighth deliberation in the second series, which is entitled "The Victory of the Conciliatory Spirit in Love, Which Wins the One Overcome." She there attributes to Kierkegaard the view that "our duty is to express forgiveness even in the absence of any sign of repentance or even any request for forgiveness" (p. 204). Levinas, as she points out, holds the conflicting view that one cannot forgive until the offender has repented and sought forgiveness. But Ferreira does not even consider the objection that, since one cannot forgive in advance of repentance and a request for forgiveness, one has, by the "ought" implies "can" principle and modus tollens, no duty to do so. The only problem for the view she attributes to Kierkegaard that she addresses is that "there are, of course, dangers in the notion that one should rush to forgive people before they ask for forgiveness or even acknowledge their

guilt—dangers of arrogance and conceit" (p. 206). However, she supposes that here conceit would express itself in forgiving in an unloving and self-serving manner; it does not occur to her that it might express itself in the illusion that one can do what is impossible.

Moreover, Ferreira fails to show that Kierkegaard actually holds the view she attributes to him. She tries to clinch her case in the following sentence: "For Kierkegaard, on the contrary, it is clear that fulfilling the law requires us to forgive before the other has asked for it: '[I]t is the conciliatory spirit to need to forgive already when the other person had not had the slightest thought of seeking forgiveness'; indeed, 'we are speaking about fighting in love so that the other will accept forgiveness, will allow himself to be reconciled' (WL, p. 336)" (p. 205). But the two passages from *Works of Love* Ferreira quotes in this sentence neither state nor entail that we are required to forgive before the other has repented and requested forgiveness. After all, there are needs that cannot be satisfied until after certain conditions obtain, and before such conditions obtain we can struggle to bring it about or to assist others in bringing it about that those conditions will obtain. So, given this textual evidence, perhaps a deflationary reading is called for at this juncture. Maybe the sober truth as well as the view it would be best to attribute to Kierkegaard is that, before repentance occurs and forgiveness is requested, we should be *willing* to forgive and, for that purpose, to help the offender achieve a state of repentance in which forgiveness can successfully be both given and received. In the second of the passages Ferreira quotes, Kierkegaard mentions the acceptance of forgiveness and reconciliation. If our goal is reconciliation with the wrongdoer and the forgiveness that is supposed to lead to it is a transaction involving both offer and acceptance, then we would do well to bear in mind that the wrongdoer who has not yet acknowledged guilt or repented will understandably find an offer of forgiveness insulting and reject it with indignation.

It may be that God can forgive the sins of those who do not acknowledge guilt or repent. Jesus is said to have prayed to his Father to forgive those who crucified him because they did not know what they were doing. It does not follow that we can or are duty-bound to do the same.

Ferreira does not explore connections between Kierkegaard's ethics and contemporary American or British philosophical ethics. A natural way to begin this enterprise would go through Kant's legacy. In the first part of the second deliberation in the first series, entitled "You *Shall* Love," Kierkegaard makes it clear that his ethics is fundamentally an ethics of obligation. He shares with Kant an emphasis on duty and the stringency of its demands on us, and there are interesting similarities between Kierkegaardian love of neighbor and Kantian respect for humanity. Indeed, those who are persuaded by the careful arguments of Ronald Green's *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* will conclude that there are very close ties binding the two of them. Thus Kierkegaard's ethics could fruitfully be compared to the work of such contemporary Kantian theorists as Barbara Herman, Thomas Hill, Christine Korsgaard and Onora O'Neill. Ferreira's bibliography lists no books or articles by any of these philosophers. She does not make many references to Kant; her index lists ten pages in its entry for Kant as compared to thirty-one pages in the entry for Levinas. I think

Ferreira's failure to make contact with mainstream American or British work in philosophical ethics will limit her book's influence. Even if they are Christian philosophers, American and British thinkers who have not been shown that Kierkegaard can be a partner in the conversations that define ethical theory for them are unlikely to be convinced that *Works of Love* is of enduring value for Christian ethics. Ferreira's book leaves the task of showing that this is the case undone.

I confess to being very fond of *Works of Love*. I think a Kierkegaardian ethics of the duty to love one's neighbor has more to offer contemporary Christian thought about how we should live than either the kind of Thomistic natural law theory endorsed by John Finnis or the sort of Thomistic virtue theory advocated by Alasdair MacIntyre. So I find Ferreira's book a particularly welcome and rewarding contribution to ethical thought. Even where I quarrel with its interpretations, I think it brings into focus issues that merit further debate. And even where I view its achievements as incomplete, I think it helps to define what remains to be done. I therefore strongly recommend *Love's Grateful Striving* to anyone in philosophy, religious studies or theology who is interested in Christian ethics. It deserves attention and response from a wider audience than specialists who labor exclusively in the vineyard of Kierkegaard studies.